No. 24. Baptism substituted for Circumcision.

Luke 2d, 21st.

When eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the Child, his name was called Jesus, which was so named of the Angel before he was conceived in the womb.

The business of our redemption was so great an humiliation to our Blessed Saviour, and so inestimable a benefit to mankind, that it ought to engage us to keep it fresh in our memory, and to receive it with all thankfulness of heart and obedience of life. He, who being truly God, "thought it no robbery to be equal with "God, made himself of no reputation, but took upon "Him the form of a servant," submitted himself to the rites and ceremonies of the Mosaic Law, and, at last, when He had finished and gone through them all, "He became obedient unto death, even the death "of the Cross." And the Scripture, to set forth the greatness of his Love towards us, acquaints us that He underwent all this, to restore us, who, by sin, were

his Enemies, to the favour of God, and purchase for us a state of endless & perfect happiness in Heaven.

And among the several acts of his humiliation, this of his being circumcised is not to be accounted one of the least. That He should vouchsafe to leave his glory which He had with his Father before the foundation of the world, to take our nature upon Him and to become man, was a mighty condescension in the son of God. But that He "who knew no sin," who had neither original nor actual sin of his own to answer for, should, like sinful man, undergo circumcision, was a greater. He then begun to represent mankind; He, as the promised seed of Abraham, entered into the Covenant which God was pleased to make with Abraham, and thereby undertook to keep the whole Law, to present his Father with a perfect unsinning obedience, and at last poured forth his blood on the cross to satisfy his Father's justice in our stead. So that his circumcision may be called the first step of our Redemption, because it was the first act of his obe-

dience, whereby He put our nature into a condition of being saved.

Neither was it by any means improper that our Saviour should be circumcised; for the Messiah or Christ, in whom "all the nations of the earth were to "be blessed," was to be of the seed of Abraham, to whom God had given this Sacrament of circumcision, as a token and mark of distinction by which his posterity should be known from the rest of the world. So that without this He would not have been taken for a Jew, and consequently not for the true Messiah, who was promised to come of that race and family. Besides, when God made this covenant with Abraham, He laid an heavy punishment upon such as presumed to disregard it—the uncircumcised person was to be cut off from his people, because he had broken the covenant; and therefore, instead of a Saviour, He would have proved much more a stumbling block to the Jews, who gloried mightily in their relation to Abraham, and in being God's own peculiar people in covenant with Him:

whence it was that they despised the gentile world whom, by way of scorn & contempt, they called "the uncircum-
"cised." Thus when the Prince of Tyrus was doomed to a most accursed death, the Prophet Ezekiel tells him, that "he shall die the death of the uncircumcised." And the same Prophet, speaking of the ignominious burial of Pharaoh, says, "he shall lie in the midst
"of the uncircumcised." They would have been more offended at Him for this than for his being the son of Joseph the Carpenter: the accusation urged against St. Stephen might very well have been laid to his charge—that He designed to change not only the customs, but the Sacraments which God by Moses had given them: and they might with greater reason have pleaded to Pilate that "they had a law, and by that
"law he ought to die." Christ was indeed to make a new covenant with his Father for us, but then He was first of all to keep the old one made with Abraham: "it behoved Him to fulfil all righteousness," to do and observe all those things, which, under that

more imperfect ministry of the law, were required of men to render them accepted by God. "For when "eight days were accomplished," when the eighth day was come, "for the circumcising of the child," the day which God had appointed, they circumcised Him, as tis implied, tho' not expressed in the text, by which He became, as St. Paul speaks, "a debtor to do the "whole law:" "and his name was called Jesus or "Saviour, which," &c.

In discoursing on these words, I shall 1st speak of Sacraments and other religious Rites in general.

The word Sacrament, in the ancient signification of it, was put to denote an Oath, and particularly such an Oath as soldiers took to be faithful to their Generals, and to do all those other things which the duty of their place or the discipline of war should require of them. In a like sense we find it used by the Christian Church; for by these we engage ourselves to pay fidelity and obedience to Christ "the Captain of "our salvation;" "to fight manfully under his ban-

"ner, against His and our enemies." As the Jews by receiving their sacraments "became debtors to "do the law" which Moses by God's direction gave them; so we, by our Sacraments, are tied to observe those rules and precepts which Christ hath given us in his Gospel. There is then a mutual compact, covenant, and agreement betwixt God and man; duties to be performed on ours, & mercies to be granted, on God's part. And because God hath appointed Baptism by which, at the first, we enter into, & the Lord's-Supper, by which, afterwards, we are permitted to renew our covenant with Him by vows of future obedience, hence it is that they are called Sacraments.

But sacraments and other religious rites serve also to another end and purpose, that we ourselves may remember and declare to others whose people we are, and whom we serve. That God instituted them among the Israelites, to separate and make a distinction betwixt his own servants and idolaters, betwixt Himself and the false gods of the Heathen, seems more

than probable. For in the age wherein Moses gave the Law, there were a multitude of gods worshipped. The worshippers of idols were known by some particular marks or tokens of that god whose worship it was. Wherefore it was but requisite to distinguish the true God from the false ones, and His servants from theirs, by prescribing some certain Sacraments in his service, such as were not used in any idol worship. Let it be further observed, that whereas sacraments are as the means whereby we are to receive the grace and mercy promised on God's part, and as pledges to assure us of our receiving the same, they must be of God's own appointment. But the rites and ceremonies of religion, where the scripture is silent, may be of human institution, because they only discover the true God from others, the members of one communion from those of another; & they tend to edification, decency, & order in God's worship.

Let us now proceed to consider the sacraments which God appointed the Jews to observe.

Their law consisted of so vast a number of reli-

gious observances, that, in scarce any thing were they left to their own freedom and discretion; yet how slavish so ever the dispensation was, it was suited to the slavish temper of the people on whom it was imposed.

One, however, of the most solemn of their religious rites may be observed, and then how another came to be substituted in its place.

Now circumcision was the sign of the covenant which God made with Abraham and his posterity; the seal of the righteousness of Abraham's faith, and God's acceptance of him. Circumcision was to be a distinguishing character of Abraham's seed from the rest of the world, by which it might be seen, whether or not, God performed his promise to Abraham of multiplying his seed, and at the last of the Messiah's springing from him. Christ was to be Abraham's seed, & because many ages were to pass between Abraham and Christ, God took effectual care the posterity of Abraham should not mix with other nations: and lest his family should by degrees grow uncertain & not

prove themselves his offspring, God marked them with the sign of circumcision. It served also to put them in mind of Abraham's faith and obedience, with whom God was pleased at the first to make the covenant, and to stir them up to an imitation of his virtues. Circumcision was indeed a Sacrament, and of great consequence to the Jews: for tho' it is not plainly said, yet it may well be presumed, that, by it they received pardon and forgiveness of their guilt contracted before it. Yet it was a sacrament of a painful nature; no religious rite could be more ungrateful to flesh and blood. For which reason it has been observed, it could not be dictated by nature, or man, or proceed from any other cause than the command of God. But now Christ being come in our nature, and having proved Himself to be the stock of Abraham, the promise made to him is accomplished; God has made a new covenant with Christ, and for His sake with us. Christ revealed his Father's will to us more fully than was ever done before; having offered Himself upon the cross, as "a

" full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice and satisfaction " for the sins," both original and actual, " of the " whole world." He then established a Church both of Jews and Gentiles, whereby the difference & distinction between them, which was very great, was to be laid aside. Christ having done all this, we ought to confess and look unto Him as " the author & finisher " of our faith;" and to admire the wisdom, & thankfully to acknowledge his goodness, in changing that uneasy sacrament into that more desirable and practicable one of baptism, which was of more universal significancy, and which Gentiles might practise as well as Jews.

Upon the world's being destroyed for the sins of mankind by water, the Gentiles entertained an opinion that it purified and cleansed them from all their wickedness, and restored them to their former innocence. This was the beginning of the many Purgations and Washings in use among them. From this the Jews required of all who became proselytes to their religion, a

fort of cleanſing by water, though God had not inſtituted it. And as God, when He eſtabliſhed Judaiſm, did not abrogate all the cuſtoms of the heathens, but retained thoſe that were not contrary to that religion; ſo Chriſt & his Apoſtles, who were the reformers of Judaiſm, did not ſimply condemn all the inſtitutions of the Jewiſh worſhip, leſt they ſhould ſeem too much given to innovations in God's worſhip; but, as for ſuch things as were in their own nature indifferent, they made uſe of ſeveral. Our bleſsed Lord, therefore, laying aſide circumciſion, conſecrated the cuſtom of baptiſm inſtead of it, to be the ſacrament of initiation or entrance into his Church, and a ſeal of our righteouſneſs of faith in Him.

I now proceed to conſider the two circumſtances the text takes notice of, as conſtant attendants upon circumciſion, and they are the time, and the giving the name.

The time, as the text obſerves, was the eighth day, upon which by God's own appointment every male

child was to be brought to be circumcised; a thing to be so precisely observed that, if it fell on the Sabbath, yet they circumcised the child. What reasons soever may be given for its not being done till the eighth day is not very material; yet notwithstanding we are sure that was the day, and that God thought not fit to have it done before, nor to defer it longer than the eighth day.

According to this, our mother, the Church, admonishes her children in the rubric before private baptism, that they defer not the baptism of their children longer than the first or second Sunday after their birth; and withal adds, in the Rubric before public baptism, "that "it is most convenient baptism should not be administered "but when the most number of people meet together; as "well for that the congregation there present may testify "the receiving of them that be newly baptized in the "number of Christ's church; as also because in the bap"tism of infants, every man present may be put in "remembrance of his own profession made to God in his "baptism."

The heathens themselves by some ceremonies dedicated their little infants to their idols and gods. And are our infants in a worse condition than those of the Heathens or Jews? Should not the children of the free-woman enjoy as great privileges as those of the bond-woman? If it be objected that infants are incapable of baptism, let it be considered that circumcision admitted persons into the first covenant as Baptism now doth into the second; and that God commanded babes of eight days old to be circumcised, tho all the ends of that sacrament could not be answered by them: they were incapable of understanding the nature of the institution, and the nature of that covenant into which they entered with God.

Another circumstance which the text takes notice of, is giving the child a name. The use of Christian names is to distinguish persons from one another, and they are a mark of that religion they profess, & of that God whom they worship. And they are always given at the time of their admission into the

church——a time very proper for it; because their names will be often putting them in mind of that covenant which they entered into when they received them. And this, among many other reasons, should make us set a true value upon our baptism, and upon the name we received in, and by, it.

I come now, lastly, to consider Confirmation, by which we renew our baptismal vow.

Now, as upon the account of our Parents we were admitted into the congregation of Christ's Church, by baptism during our infancy: so when we are grown to ripeness of years, and understand what a solemn vow, promise, and profession we then made by our sure-ties, it is but reasonable that we should renew and confirm the same promise and vow in our own persons. Confirmation ought to be observed, because when children come to riper years, and shall learn what and how great things their sureties did promise in their name at their baptism, they themselves should acknowledge and confirm the same, and take upon them what was

promised and vowed in their name. They should endeavor, through the help of Divine Grace, to observe all those things to which they, at their confirmation, gave their assent. By this we discharge our sureties from that promise they made for us, and do now take the obligation of performing it upon ourselves. The Jews began to teach their circumcised children some select places of scripture as soon as they were able to speak. The child being so instructed and grown up a little was bound to observe the precepts of the law, and was accounted guilty and liable to punishment if he transgressed them, whereas before, his faults were imputed to his father. As for the time of our confirmation the church does not fix any certain year, but says it shall be done only to such as are well instructed in the catechism, and are of competent years to profit by it.

Let no parents, then, neglect to have their children confirmed: for by this solemn ceremony they are accounted worthy the name of Christian, and

become entitled and are admitted to partake of the Lord's Supper, the chief mystery of the Christian Religion. Now to God, &c.

Theoph^s. J. St. John.

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